



CIFOR infobrief

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CIFOR *infobrief* provides concise, accurate, peer-reviewed information on current topics in forest research

Not by grain alone... Woodlands and rural livelihoods in dryland Africa

Key points

- Create a framework to allow people to make their own choices.
- Foster social learning and innovation.
- Invest in rural organizations.
- Strengthen markets.
- Give communities control over woodlands and the returns from their investments.
- Encourage fairness, collaboration and conflict management.
- Reconsider policies that encourage woodland destruction.
- Provide financial, marketing and technical services
- Bring livelihood and landscape approaches into conservation efforts.

The challenge

Despite decades of investment in rural development, poverty is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, with no signs of significant reduction. This *Infobrief* highlights the role of woodlands and trees on farms in livelihood. Building on the lessons learned from more than 20 years of natural resource-based development in rural Africa, this *Infobrief* introduces principles and actions to invest in Africa's future.

The African context

In 2000, the gross domestic product of the whole region was only 1.1 percent of the global economy, even though the region holds 10 percent of the world's population. Over the next 20 years, Africa's urban population is predicted to more than double and nearly half of all Africans will live in cities. That drives most shifts in market demand, many of which will benefit rural producers.

The region's economies have grown slowly. Between 1990 and 1999, per capita income in Africa grew by less than 0.1 percent per year, with some notable exceptions. Almost 60 percent of rural Africans live on less than \$1 per day. For people with such low incomes, economic activities that provide several hundred dollars worth of products or services can make a huge difference.

Many rural Africans remain disenfranchised, with insecure tenure and use, limited participation in decisions that affect their livelihoods, little access to information and lack of legal recognition. Despite the difficulties the rural poor have found innovative ways to cope and even flourish. Rather than degrading their natural resources, in some places they have improved them. They take advantage of market opportunities. They are building new institutions.



People use plants and animals from woodlands and planted trees for food, energy, medicine, fodder, housing, furniture, dyes, agricultural implements and utensils. Here a woman collects mushrooms for home consumption and sale. (Photo by Tony Cunningham)

The dryland environment

The challenges facing rural households in semi-arid regions are particularly extreme. Low and erratic rainfall, frequent droughts and poor soils make agriculture difficult. Surface and groundwater supplies are often poorly developed. Chronic food shortages are widespread. Environmental problems include deforestation, overgrazing of rangelands and increased soil erosion. Farmers cannot obtain credit. Markets are underdeveloped and difficult to access. Little advice is available. HIV/AIDS is having far-reaching effects.

Natural resources - cornerstones of a diverse livelihood

In semi-arid areas, it is usual for a household to raise livestock, grow crops, collect forest products for

subsistence needs and sales, trade within the community and have family members in off-farm employment sending money to the household. The range of activities shows why agriculture should not be the only focus of rural development in semi-arid areas. Hundreds of millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa obtain much of their subsistence from forest products.

Causes of poverty

Poverty has many causes with no simple solutions. An integrated, multi-sectoral approach to development is critical, with different but complementary activities. Some of the main causes are:

- adverse biophysical conditions, resulting in low agricultural potential and loss of livestock.
- loss of breadwinners, labour scarcities, even more so in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.
- economic remoteness, with higher transaction and input costs and few investments.
- lack of credit markets as a result of little or no collateral.
- few employment opportunities.
- low levels of education and skill.
- poor macro-economic conditions.
- declining woodland resources making it harder to acquire basic products.

Building on positive trends

Growing support for community control over natural resources

Not all trends are negative. Increasingly, African governments are willing to support forest, land and wildlife policies that favour local communities. Over the last few decades many countries have approved policies and laws that recognize community ownership and management. *Research is needed to pinpoint where local management benefits people and woodlands and how best to promote this.*

Promising markets

Rapid growth in Africa's urban population have increased domestic demand for many forest products. This is a major opportunity for rural livelihoods. However, market development often leads to unsustainable extraction. *Research is needed to identify how to earn a livelihood from a resource without destroying it.*

Resourceful farmers in a changing world

Farming households have rich and varied ways to earn a living and show great resourcefulness in adapting. They have planted trees and protected areas for natural regeneration. They have responded to new market opportunities. This has allowed them to survive and sometimes even flourish. *Research is needed to understand and build on these dynamics.*



Promising directions for development

Integrating *nature* (environmental management), *wealth* (economic concerns) and *power* (good governance) makes for successful development. Good management of natural resources increases productivity and conserves biodiversity. It also stimulates economic growth in local communities and moves rural people from 'subject' to 'citizen' leading the way towards a more democratic, decentralized and vibrant society. Box 1 illustrates what governments can do to promote livelihood gains and environmental sustainability. Box 2 lists principles and actions for investment in rural Africa.

A woman cultivating maize in a landscape dominated by miombo woodland. Woodlands, through firewood, construction wood, wild foods and livestock browse and graze, provide more income than crops. (Photo by B.M Campbell)

Chivi, a case study from Zimbabwe

- Income (cash + subsistence) from woodland products is 15 percent of total income. Income from livestock is 21 percent. Graze and browse from woodlands provides the bulk of the feed for livestock.
- Income from woodland products is much more important to 'very poor' households (33 percent of total income) than to 'wealthy' households (7 percent).
- Cash from sales of woodland products is 15 percent of total cash income for the 'very poor' households, but less than 1 percent for the 'wealthy' households.

From: Campbell, B.M., Jeffrey, S., Luckert, M., Mutamba, M. and Zindi, C. 2002. Household livelihoods in semi-arid regions: options and constraints. Center for International Forestry Research, Bogor.

Box 1. What should governments do?**Give communities control over forest resources and encourage their equitable distribution**

Governments should give rural communities clear and secure rights over woodlands and allow them to transport and sell forest products. This will help local people to maintain access to resources they depend on and encourage them to prevent over-exploitation. Governments should make fewer and simpler regulations. Forestry officials should be made accountable to the local population.

Reconsider policies that encourage woodland destruction

Many policies that seem to have little relation to woodlands often stimulate woodland loss and degradation. These include currency devaluations, constructing roads, reverse migration towards rural areas, trade policies that restrict agricultural imports, eliminating fertilizer and energy subsidies, granting logging and mining concessions, and relocating people.

Provide financial, marketing and technical services

Governments should provide financial, marketing and technical services to villagers and small forest enterprises. Forest-related skills should be incorporated into rural and micro-enterprise development. Technical services should be structured in relation to the low incomes of the households involved. As far as possible these approaches should build on existing farmer adaptations.

Bring livelihood and landscape approaches into conservation efforts

National and international conservation efforts can restrict access by rural households to natural resources. But they can also provide new sources of funding to compensate local people for efforts to conserve wildlife and habitats. Conservation approaches that consider the entire landscape, not just the core protected areas, need to be encouraged and ways of paying local people for conservation services need to be devised.

From: Kaimowitz, D. 2002. Not by bread alone. Forests and Rural Livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa. Center for International Forestry Research, Bogor.

Where to go from here

A new opportunity

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is an opportunity to revitalize Africa. Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes (PRSPs) can succeed but they need to incorporate natural resource issues. The research community can provide the support needed to make NEPAD and PRSPs a success.

An essential debate

The recommendations in Boxes 1 and 2 are only the start of a spirited debate that has to take place under trees in villages, district council offices, ministry conference rooms and classrooms around Africa.

Much of the discussion on woodlands and poverty alleviation focuses on livelihood contributions. But much of the information now available is out-of-date and incomplete, while the reality is highly dynamic and diverse. New studies are needed to identify the most important resources and find ways for the people to take advantage of them.

Africa is short of funds, trained human resources and institutional capacity. Identifying management approaches suitable for woodlands, as well as policy and organisational requirements, must be tailored to social, economic and technological realities.

Future climate change is a looming threat for Africa. The 20-year Sahelian drought has forced adaptation to lower rainfall. There is evidence of considerable ecosystem resilience; rapid adaptability of institutions and lifestyles; greater integration of land uses; intensified management and privatisation of scarce resources. This experience needs analysis to prepare for the future.

Any research and development initiative to improve livelihoods and the environment must give greater rights and responsibilities to local people. We need to understand the roles of the different groups in a multi-stakeholder environment and how transferring power affects livelihoods. We need to find the best way to implement development based on social learning, action research and adaptive management.

An increased awareness

Most policymakers, development and conservation professionals and the general public do not realize how important tree resources really are for the rural poor in dryland Africa, much less what needs to be done to use those resources to assist the poor. That case must be made using solid data and giving people a real sense of what that data means. The truth is that these resources have an essential role to play in any serious strategy to reduce rural poverty.

Key references

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- Monela, G.C., G.C. Kajembe, A.R.S. Kaoneka and G. Kowero. 1999. "Household Livelihood Strategies in the Miombo Woodlands of Tanzania", *Tanzania Journal of Forestry and Nature Conservancy*, 73:17-33.

Box 2. Principles to guide investment in Africa

Nature

1. Improve information and knowledge management systems

- Improve information use and linkages between stakeholders
- Develop networks and communities of practice
- Develop monitoring and evaluation systems
- Use science as a support tool
- Capitalize on field experience
- Increase transparency and information access
- Promote research, extension and education linkages

2. Promote local land use planning and resource tenure systems

- Negotiate clear limits
- Recognize the need to partition use
- Promote participatory approaches that include gender and user groups
- Make procedures simple, straightforward and understandable
- Promote agriculture/NRM integration
- Promote risk management and contingency planning
- Act locally, but promote an ecosystem vision

3. Foster social learning and innovation

- Encourage social learning
- Foster innovation and experimentation
- Promote adaptive management

4. Build capacity in human resources

- Train rural staff
- Build flexible local capacity

5. Develop effective extension services

- Work with skilled partners
- Facilitate farmer-to-farmer and group approaches
- Strive for cost-effectiveness
- Promote new approaches to organizing knowledge support

Wealth

1. Manage the economics of natural resources

- Coordinate NRM resource allocation
- Plan and invest at national, regional, local and micro levels
- Focus on changing tomorrow's economy
- Encourage an enabling environment
- Support alternative income strategies

2. Strengthen markets and make incentives part of the strategy

- Help build competitive rural markets
- Promote and/or facilitate joint ventures

3. Invest in rural organizations to encourage rural development

- Promote self-reliance
- Promote and fund local credit schemes
- Emphasize transparency and financial sustainability
- Create systems that facilitate market participation
- Promote establishment of robust rural groups and federations

4. Create a framework to allow people to make their own choices

- Promote NRM solutions that make financial sense and foster economic opportunity
- Apply design and operational principles and make economic analysis
- Assure that strategic plans address tenure arrangements
- Explore ways of assuring payment for environmental services

5. Give resource managers access to the returns from their investments

- Plan how changing production requirements interact with land tenure systems
- Foster fair common property management
- Encourage and protect clear tenure and property-right systems

Power

1. Strengthen procedural rights for rural people

- Promote understanding of and access to procedural rights
- Assure information access, decision-making and environmental recourse
- Assure rights of association, speech, movement and access to government institutions
- Strengthen environmental legislation
- Recognize local communities and user groups

2. Improve rural representation in public decisions

- Build independent organizations that represent rural views
- Contribute to performance of government officials and institutions with rural representation

3. Distribute environmental functions to suitable institutions

- Encourage inclusive national-level debate to guide restructuring of natural resource governance
- Shift the role of central state authorities from command and control toward technical support and legal oversight

4. Transfer environmental powers to local populations

- Transfer discretionary decisions before obligations
- Make transfers in the form of secure rights
- Transfer powers even before capacity is demonstrated.

5. Develop minimum environmental standards

6. Encourage fairness, collaboration and conflict management

- Create or modify forums for NRM discussion
- Recognize that NRM conflicts can present learning opportunities and facilitate conflict management
- Promote social approaches that do not depend on consensus and help identify losers and problems

From: USAID, 2002. Nature, wealth and power. Emerging best practice for revitalizing rural Africa. USAID, Washington.



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